

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 25, 2009

His Excellency
Asif Ali Zardari
President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Dear Mr. President,

We write as Members of Congress to raise our concern over the recent spate of attacks on religious minorities throughout Pakistan. We are particularly concerned that the respect for justice so recently demanded by the people of Pakistan following the removal of Pakistani Chief Justice Iftikhar Ali Chaudhry by then-President Pervez Musharraf appears to be deteriorating. With genuine understanding and sympathy for the dire humanitarian situation and the serious threat of terrorism facing Pakistan, we respectfully urge the Government of Pakistan to do all it can to protect religious minorities from further attacks, intolerance, and discrimination.

We recall that Muhammad Ali Jinnah, founder of the Republic, in an historic speech before the constituent assembly in 1947 urged citizens to worship as they choose. He stated, "You may belong to any religion or caste or creed-that has nothing to do with the business of the State." Therefore, it is unfortunate that blasphemy laws under Section 295(c) of the Pakistan Penal Code have led to increasing acts of religious intolerance against religious minorities, thousands of whom have had cases filed against them often on the basis of false accusations and with little recourse or justice.

For instance, on June 30, 2009, Sardar Masih was attacked by a group of men while returning from the fields on his tractor in Kasur district's Bahmaniwala village when he requested that another man move his motorbike so he could pass. Shortly after Masih returned home, the men followed him there and attacked his family, leaving several wounded. Moreover, the following day, on July 1st, upon receiving a call to violence from a local mosque, the attackers joined with a large mob of Muslim villagers and attacked Christian homes in Masih's village, looting and attacking those at home.

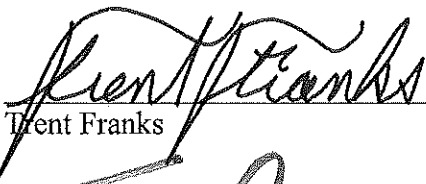
Furthermore, on August 1, 2009, a mob of 1,000 Muslims attacked the Christian community in the village of Gojra following what the Government later declared was a false accusation of blasphemy. At least eight people were burned to death, while more than 50 homes and a church were also burned. According to the Government, members of a pro-Taliban and al Qaeda-linked group were arrested for planning the attack, which was incited following a call from a local mosque. The same blasphemy charges incited another mob of Muslims, also responding to a call from a mosque in the village of Korian, to attack local Christian homes there as well on the previous day, burning 60 homes and forcing nearly all of the Christians to flee the village. Most recently, 22-year-old Robert "Fanish" Danish died on September 15, 2009 in Sialkot, while in police custody on charges of blasphemy. Despite police reports claiming he committed suicide, many are calling for further investigation into his death.

These incidents represent only a few of the reported attacks that belie our serious concern over the fragile state of democracy and deteriorating protection for religious minorities in Pakistan. While we commend all efforts to provide reparations to the victims and their families for the violence that occurred in Gojra, reparations will not prevent further attacks or provide justice for the victims. Moreover, while welcoming the Pakistan Parliament's condemnation of the killing of Christians in Gojra, we hope the Government will work to address what Federal Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti condemned as the reason for these events - Pakistan's blasphemy laws, which he pointed to for allowing such intolerance and violence to perpetuate itself. In light of these concerns, we would like to know the following:

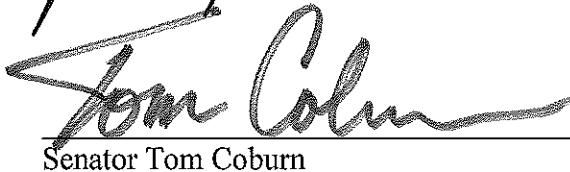
- What is the Government of Pakistan doing to review the compatibility of all blasphemy legislation with the universally recognized freedom of religion?
- What is the Government of Pakistan doing to take action against those who make false claims of blasphemy in order to incite violence, and in particular, those involved in the attacks in Kasur, Gojra, Korian, and Sialkot?
- What kind of early warning mechanism does the Government of Pakistan have in order to protect citizens from calls to violence announced from local mosques?
- What is the burden of proof used to allow citizens to file claims of blasphemy against other citizens and do claims need to meet a certain threshold of evidence before being filed?
- What education does the Government of Pakistan provide the general public on the rights of religious minorities in order to create a climate of religious tolerance?

As Members of Congress, we recognize the serious consequences of religious intolerance on international security, as well as a nation's own domestic security. We appreciate the renewed vigilance by the Government of Pakistan to fight terrorism in the Northwest Frontier Province, a region where religious minorities have been particularly vulnerable, and we look forward to continuing to work with you in this regard. We appreciate your consideration of our concerns and look forward to your response.

Most sincerely,

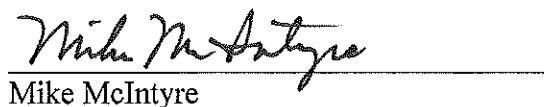

Trent Franks

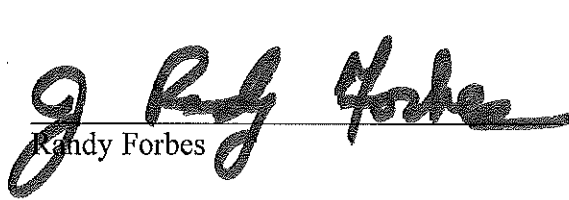

Emanuel Cleaver, II


Senator Tom Coburn


Al Green


Joseph Pitts


Mike McIntyre

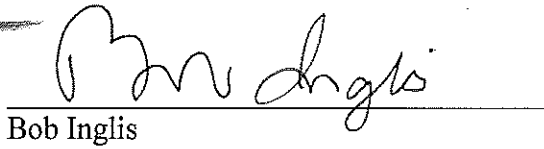

Randy Forbes

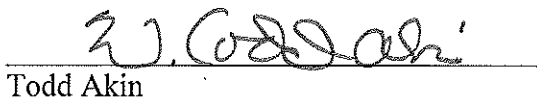

Michele Bachmann


Frank R. Wolf


Christopher H. Smith


Dan Burton


Bob Inglis


Todd Akin


Mike Pence


Anh "Joseph" Cao

Cc: U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard C. Holbrooke
U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, Anne W. Patterson